

THE PRESIDENT'S MOTORCYCLE ESCORT:
Activities Immediately After the
Shots Were Fired

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The Warren Commission in its investigation into the assassination of President Kennedy not only selected its evidence carefully; it made no systematic study of the evidence it did collect. An example is its easy treatment of four of the closest witnesses to the shooting, the four motorcycle officers who rode the rear bumper of the limousine. These men were trained observers, they were there to guard the President, they were located at a distance of less than ten feet from the President when all the shots were fired - closer than any other witnesses except those in the limousine itself; and, unlike these witnesses, they had an unobstructed view of the President and did not feel themselves to be under fire. -Yet only two of these officers were called to testify. Of a ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ third we have secondhand information. Of the fourth we have no information, by name, at all.

As a result of the Commission's refusal to study and arrange its evidence, a number of errors and misconceptions have arisen in regard to the behavior of this four-man escort immediately after the shots were fired. The most recent inaccuracy to appear is in an article in the Saturday Evening Post, Dec. 2, 1967, by Josiah Thompson:

"It seemed like his head exploded," testified Officer Bobby Hargis, "and I was splattered with blood and brain, and a kind of bloody water." The splash of this debris so established in his mind the idea that the shot came from the right front that he got off his cycle and led the chase onto the knoll (see pictures on pages 28 and 29)."

The photographs Thompson refers to are the first and third of three taken by Wilma Bond. The caption under Bond #1 in the Post reads:

"Hargis was hit so strongly by a shower of the President's blood that he felt sure that the shot came from the right front. Dismounting, he turns and looks toward the grassy knoll."

Far from being pictured "dismounting" in this photograph, Hargis is pictured a good six feet behind his cycle and running toward it. He appears to have stopped in midrun because his attention has been drawn to something to his right.

The caption to the second photograph of Wilma Bond, which may be referred to as Bond #3, reads:

"Seconds later, Hargis has actually climbed the knoll, looking for the assassin (the arrow shows the officer's white helmet). Other witnesses now scramble after Hargis up the knoll."

It is true that this photograph depicts an officer running west up the grassy knoll. But this officer is not Hargis, since the Hargis cycle toward which Hargis was running from the east knoll in Bond #1 is missing from Bond #3. Another cycle has appeared in Bond #3. This cycle may be seen over the hood of the car in the center of the picture. It may also be seen in Willis #6, up against the north curb of Elm

Street over the hood of the car just left of center in the photograph. The helmet of this officer may also be seen at the left end of the Fort Worth turnpike sign as he begins to climb the knoll. Thus a simple study of the photographic evidence should have divested Mr. Thompson of his idea that it is Hargis running west up the knoll in Bond #3. Had Mr. Thompson read the testimony of Officer Hargis, he could have been even more sure of this fact.

Perhaps it is time to set the record straight on the President's motorcycle escort.

There were four officers at the rear of the linesine when the shooting occurred. They were B.J. Martin and Bobby Hargis, to the left side of Elm Street, and D.L. Jackson and James Chaney, to the right side of Elm Street. These officers constituted the second section of the motorcycle escort. The lead escort was in front of Chief Curry's car and going into the underpass when the shots were fired. Officer Brewer testified that he was through the underpass and did not even hear the shots. The second section of the escort was the four man team behind the President's car, immediately at the bumper. A third section was turning from Main onto Houston Street, more than a block back when the shots were fired. Thus the only members of the escort in a position to have seen anything and acted upon immediately were the four officers riding right behind the President.

That more than one member of this four-man escort dispersed immediately after the shots there can be no doubt. Following are statements taken from three witnesses who were standing on the Elm Street viaduct when the shots struck the President. It should be kept in mind that these men had a wide unobstructed view of the escort and the President's car.

"Mr. Winborn stated he was not able to ascertain exactly where the shots were fired from. His attention remained on President Kennedy and the motorcycle escort. Mr. Winborn stated that very shortly thereafter the motorcycle escort dispersed...."

FBI interview with Walter Luke Winborn
Volume 22, p. 833. Proceedings.

"He stated that he first realized something was wrong when the motorcycles began moving from their regular courses. At or just before this he heard sounds that could have been shots."

Clemen Earl Johnson
FBI interview with ~~George A. Davis~~
Vol 22, p. 837 836

"(He) saw President Kennedy slump forward and the police motorcycle escort maneuver swiftly about the area. Mr. Davis stated his attention was directed to the motorcycle escort---"

FBI interview with George A. Davis
Vol. 22, p. 837

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These statements make it abundantly clear that the motorcycles in question belonged to the four man escort immediately behind the President's car since no others would have been visible to observers on the viaduct at the time the shots were heard and the President was seen to slump.

What were these maneuvers about the area? Which of these four men did what just after the shots were fired? In the case of two of them, Hargis and Martin, the evidence is clear: both men rode on to the hospital with the motorcade.

MARTIN

Mr. Martin: After the shots we picked up speed.

Commission Counsel: Did you go on to Parkland?

Mr. Martin: Yes, sir; I did.

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CHANNEY

James Chaney was not called to testify; however Officer Hargis volunteered information about him in his testimony:

Mr. Hargis: ...Chaney put his motor in first gear and accelerated up to the front to tell them to get everything out of the way, he was coming through...

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Chief of Police Jesse Curry confirmed in his testimony that Chaney rode up to the lead car and informed him that the President had been hit.

We are left then with only two officers of the four man team who were in a position to "maneuver about the area", Hargis himself, and D.L. Jackson. Hargis' testimony about his own actions is very clear:

HARGIS

Mr. Hargis: ...Chaney put his motor in first gear and accelerated up to the front to tell them to get everything out of the way he was coming through, and that is when the President's ~~car~~ limousine shot off, and I stepped and got off my motorcycle and ran to the right hand side of the street, behind the light pole....

Mr. Stern: You say you parked your motorcycle?

Mr. Hargis: It was to the left hand side of the street from - south side of Elm Street.

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Hargis then went on to testify: "I remember a man holding a child. Fell to the ground and covered his child with his body... I ran to the light post and I ran up to this kind of little wall..."

The Bond photo showing Hargis coming up behind his cycle, Bond #1, shows, in the direction from which Hargis is running, a man on the ground with a child behind the lamp post. This makes it clear that Hargis ran immediately back up the knoll in a northeasterly direction, just as he testified. The man on the ground with his child can be identified. It is William Eugene Newman, Jr. The FBI interviewed both Newman and his wife:

"Newman first thought the President and Governor were playing some kind of game and suddenly realized they had been shot and that he was perhaps in the line of fire because officers started running toward the arcade directly back of him and his wife."

FBI interview with William E. Newman
Vol 22, p. 842

"She stated that after the President was shot officers and probably secret service men started running toward the arcade near the point where the photographer was taking his pictures... After the shots she and her husband each grabbed a child and lay down on the grass..."

FBI interview with Frances Gayle Newman
Vol. 22, p. 842

These statements show that the wall to which Hargis referred was most likely the abutment on which stood Abraham Zapruder who took the well known movie film of the assassination. That motorcycle officers from this four man escort immediately behind the car ran toward the direction of Zapruder is also confirmed in his own testimony:

Mr. Liebler: As you were standing on this abutment facing Elm Street, you say the police ran over behind the concrete structure behind you...

Mr. Zapruder: After the shots?

Mr. Liebler: Yes.

Mr. Zapruder:...yes, after the shots, yes, some of them were motorcycle cops - I guess they left their motorcycles running and they were running behind me, of course, in the line of the shooting. I guess they thought it came from right behind me... I assumed that they (the shots) came from there because as the police started running back of me, it looked like it came from in back of me.

It will be noted that by the time Bond #1 was taken Zapruder was no longer on the abutment. Thus one or more motorcycle officers ran behind Zapruder before this photograph was taken, and one of them would undoubtedly be Officer Hargis seen in this photograph running up behind his cycle from that direction - which is where Hargis

testified that he had been.

That Hargis and at least one other officer made a quick trip up the knell long before an officer is pictured running up the west knell in Bond #2 and #3 and Willis #7, is made apparent from the testimony of photographer James Altgens:

"The car never did stop. It was proceeding along in a slow pace and I stepped out in the curb area and made another picture as the Secret Service man stepped upon the rear step of the Presidential ~~limousine~~ car and went to Mrs. Kennedy's aid and then after that I immediately crossed the street ...The Secret Service men, uniformed policemen with drawn guns that went racing up this little incline...I started up the incline with - or, after, the officers...but before I had gotten over one-quarter of the way up the incline, I met the officers coming back...I noticed the couple that were on the ground with their children..."

Vol 7, pp/ 518 and 519

Thus it seems that a simple reading of the evidence should have indicated to Mr. Thompson that Hargis did not immediately jump off his cycle and run west up the incline along and behind the picket fence, as the officer is depicted doing in Bond #2 and #3:

Mr. Stern: Did you get behind the picket fence that runs from the overpass to the concrete wall?

Mr. Hargis: No, no; I don't remember any picket fence.

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We can now reconstruct with certainty the movements of Officer Hargis immediately after the shots were fired: he stopped his cycle on the south side of Elm Street across from the steps to the Memorial Arches, ran ~~xxx~~ across the street, and east up the incline, saw Mr. Newman fall to the ground with his child, ran up to and probably behind the concrete abutment where Zapruder stood, turned and ran immediately back to his cycle (Bond #1), got on, and as he testified rode off under both underpasses. He returned in a few moments and took up a position at the Texas School Book Depository corner, according to his further testimony, substantiated by the radio log.

JACKSON

The fourth motorcycle officer riding at the immediate rear of the President's car was not called to testify; his name does not appear in the index to the Proceedings. No information is available about the activities of this man during or right after the assassination. However, if Jackson rode his assignment that day, we can reconstruct these post-assassination activities with certainty. (It is, of course, possible that there was a last minute substitution in this position immediately at the rear of the President's car, so it should be kept in mind that when ~~xx~~ the name "Jackson" is used this is a tentative identification. The actions of this fourth officer, unlike his name, cannot be in doubt after a study of the evidence.)

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It will be apparent from the following quotations that the fourth member of the motorcycle escort was engaged in the most spectacular activity of all right after the shots were fired.

"President Kennedy slumped forward in his seat and appeared to have been hit by a bullet.

"Simmons said he recalled that a motorcycle policeman drove up the grassy slope toward the Texas School Depository Building, jumped off his motorcycle and then ran up the hill toward the Memorial Arches."

FBI interview with James L. Simmons
Vol 22, p. 833

"Mr. Winbern stated he was not able to ascertain exactly where the shots were fired from as his attention remained on President Kennedy and the motorcycle escort ... Mr. Winbern stated that very shortly thereafter the motorcycle escort dispersed and one motorcycle was abandoned by the police officer riding it on the grassy slope on the ~~xxxx~~ north side of Elm Street and this officer rushed up the steps leading to the pavillion and was lost from sight. The vehicle carrying the President immediately left the area at a high rate of speed."

FBI interview with Walter Luke Winbern
Vol. 22, p.

"He stated that he first realized that something was wrong when the motorcycle escort began moving from their regular courses and at or just before this he heard sounds that could have been shots. Mr. Johnson states that white smoke was observed near the pavillion but he felt that this smoke came from a motorcycle abandoned near the spot by a Dallas policeman."

FBI interview with Clemen Earl Johnson
Vol. 22, p. 836

These statements from Simmons, Winbern and Johnson are unmistakable; the ~~xxxxxx~~ rider on the slope was a member of the escort immediately at the rear of the limesine. It could not have been Martin, Hargis, or Chaney. Therefore the officer must be Mr. Jackson, who was not called to testify to the Commission about what he saw when he rode up the slope, or why, indeed he rode up there. It is also strange that this ride is not pictured in any of the films, taken from the ~~xxxx~~ south side of the street. That it happened and that it involved one of the escort at the right rear of the President's limesine is clear from the testimony of two witnesses who saw it from widely different angles, S.M. Holland, on the overpass, and Lee Bowers, on the north terminal railroad tower. ~~xxxxxx~~ saw Hargis drop off his cycle on the south side of the street and an officer of the same escort ride up the knoll:

Mr. Holland: ...Now do you want to know about the two policemen that were riding in the motorcade and one of them throwed his motorcycle down right in the middle of the street and run up towards that location with his gun in his hand.

Mr. Stern: Toward -

Mr. Holland: Toward the location that-

Mr. Stern: Where you saw the puff of smoke?

Mr. Holland: Where I saw the puff of smoke. And another one tried to ride up the hill on his motorcycle and got halfway up there and he run up the rest of the way on foot.

Mr. Stern: Go ahead. This is at the time of the -

Mr. Holland: At the time of -

Mr. Stern: That the shots were fired?

Mr. Holland: The shots was fired.

Mr. Stern: Two motorcycle policemen who were in the motorcade?

Mr. Holland: In the motorcade, and one of them throwed his motorcycle down right in the middle of the street and ran up the incline with his pistol in his hand, and the other motorcycle policeman jumped over the curb with his motorcycle and tried to ride up the hill on his motorcycle, and he -tipped over with him up there, and he ran up there the rest of the way with his ...

Vol. 6, p. 247.

Since no officers riding motorcycles were in a position to have taken the action described by Mr. Holland immediately at the time the shots were fired, the two officers whose actions are described have to be Margis and Jackson.

Lee Bowers testimony makes the same point:

Mr. Ball: Did you observe any activity on this high ground above Elm after the shots?

Mr. Bowers: At the time of the shooting there seemed to be some commotion and immediately following there was a motorcycle policeman who shot nearly all the way to the top of the incline...He was part of the motorcade and left it for some reason I did not know...He came almost to the top and I believe abandoned his motorcycle for a moment

and then get on it and proceeded, I don't know...

Mr. Ball: How did he get up?

Mr. Bowers: He just shot up over the ^{curb} ~~xxx~~ and up.

Mr. Ball: He didn't come by way of Elm Street which dead ends there?

Mr. Bowers: No; he left the motorcade and came up the incline on the motorcycle.

Vol. 6, p. 288.

The Commission took only enough interest in Mr. Bowers testimony to misrepresent it in the Report: on p. 83 of the Report, it is stated that the officer observed by Lee Bowers and others was Officer Clyde Maygood. Maygood's testimony (Vol. 6, p. 296) makes clear that he did not jump the curb with his cycle: he explicitly states so. Nor was he in a position to have raced up the knoll immediately after the shots were fired, as Bowers ~~xxx~~ says the officer did: Maygood was riding at the corner of Main and Houston when the shots were fired.

Curiously enough, William Manchester (P. 151, Death of a President) makes the same error. He states that the motorcycle officer riding the ^{right} rear bumper" of the President's limosine immediately left the motorcade, ~~banned~~ the curb and raced up the knoll on foot. This is information that Manchester could only have gleaned from Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy who was coming over the right rear trunk of the car at the time this officer made his dash. However, Manchester also ~~misidentifies~~ this officer as Clyde Maygood...who was riding by his own testimony "several car lengths" behind the President. He was in fact the partner of Marion Baker who charged into the Texas School Depository Building after the shots were fired, and both men were riding at Main and Houston when they heard the shots, as their testimony ~~xxxxxx~~ makes explicit.

Maygood did testify that he ~~xxxxxx~~ rode around to the scene of the shooting, tried to jump the curb and failed, and ran up the knoll to the railroad yard on foot. Maygood would thus be the officer pictured in Bond #2 and #3 and Willis #7, running along the picket fence.

Thus, of the four men at the immediate rear of the car who were in a position to have observed events in the immediate aftermath of the shooting and who could have taken action, the only one who appears to have taken direct and purposeful action is the one completely missing from the Commission's evidence. We can not even be sure of the man's name! Yet he is the officer pictured directly to the right of the President in the famous Altgens photograph and looking right at him: in short this is the witness closest to the President of any except those in the limosine. And he is completely missing from the official case. Why?